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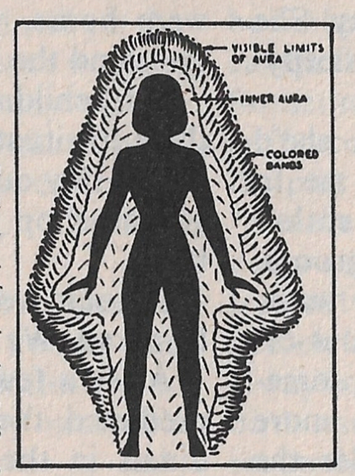

Diagram of normal aura based on sketch by Walter J. Kilner, M.D.

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BOOKS

NEWS & REVIEWS

by Jerome Clark

NESS SENSE AND NONSENSE

WITH *The Enigma of Loch Ness* (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Ill., 1986, 243 pages, $22.95) Henry H. Bauer, professor of chemistry and former dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, has written a strange book, one that is equally illuminating and infuriating. It is, on one hand, a defense of the proposition that real unknown animals exist in that fabled Scottish lake. It is, on the other, an exasperating case of special pleading.

At its best it is a perceptive and refreshingly moderate examination of an interesting scientific controversy. Dr. Bauer's brand of skepticism is all too rarely encountered. "One should maintain some awareness that one's own beliefs, though rational, may turn out to be wrong," he writes, "and one ought to remember that the conflicting beliefs of others are not necessarily false, and that even if they are false, they may nonetheless be rational." In common with all of us, as we shall see, Bauer has a hard time matching ideals with actions.

Bauer cautions that science's claims must also be viewed with skepticism. "Many things scientific have been untrue — all superseded theories, for example, and all present ones that await becoming superseded." Yet on the whole science works because "it does not stray from what has already been established and accepted as known." This natural conservatism, for all its undoubted virtues, makes it difficult for scientists to deal with alleged phenomena beyond those boundaries. *Enigma* is a look at a controversy with which science is unprepared to deal.

Those who are interested in anomalies — and who, more specifically, have tried to investigate anomalous phenomena themselves — will nod knowingly as Bauer recounts the difficulties inherent in pursuing subjects that, because they are not "respectable," depend largely on the services of amateurs. Some do excellent work, some are crazy, some are there to make a buck by fair means or foul.

Few of the scientists who involve themselves in the research are willing to identify themselves publicly, lest they be subjected to ridicule or loss of employment. The scientific establishment, loath to acknowledge that "we simply don't know," opts for an easy dogmatism which holds that it doesn't investigate Nessie reports because Nessie doesn't exist.

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"Left to themselves," Bauer says, "no doubt the biologists would simply ignore the matter, as they have other premature discoveries. . . . But they have not been left alone. Instead they are harried by the press for categorical answers. . . . The 'maybe,' 'so what,' and 'where could we go from here?' thus become increasingly defensive and have led to outright rejection. Surely this is understandable in psychological terms: if something is premature it is ignored as though it does not exist; and it is an easy step from acting as though a thing does not exist to believing that it does not. Thus ignoring the premature can easily become resisting it."

Bauer complains, legitimately, about the way debunking polemicists invariably link the Loch Ness question with all kinds of fringe claims of wildly varying credibility (a typical example being a *Time* blast at "claims of the pseudoscientists . . . Uri Geller, the Bermuda Triangle, ESP, levitation, Jeanne [sic] Dixon, Kirlian photography, the Loch Ness monster, psychic surgery, Immanuel Velikovsky, thinking ivy plants and . . . flying saucers"). The technique is intended, of course, to impute guilt by association.

But while one expects Bauer to protest that these are all separate questions, with some commanding better evidence than others, Bauer takes his argument elsewhere. It turns out that there is only one legitimate anomaly: the Loch Ness monster. (Bauer does allow for sea serpents, but only because they are related to the Loch Ness phenomena, in his view.) *Enigma* argues that Nessie shouldn't be down there among all those disreputables, which presumably deserve whatever they get.

This argument develops in dismaying fashion from a perfectly sound objection to the foolish practice of some individuals (most notably the late F. W. Holiday) who have sought to link Nessie-like creatures with other dimensions, occultism and alien visitors. (Richard Hall calls those who can't keep their anomalies separate "mixologists.") And Bauer quite rightly takes exception to such exhibitions as psychics' attempts to contact Nessie telepathically or to "exorcise" the presumably demonic creatures. Such antics taint "the credibility of the quest," Bauer complains.

He complains further that "crankish" and "fringe" magazines ("*INFO, Pursuit,* FATE, *Fortean Times*") publish pro-Nessie articles "and the connection is given credence when a monster hunter gives an interview to such a publication." A footnote following that sentence reveals that Bauer is alluding to my interview with Roy Mackal in the September-October 1977 issues of FATE. (Poor Mackal, whom Bauer criticizes freely all through the book, is elsewhere taken to task for excessively cautious views, some of them expressed in that same FATE interview!) Of course Bauer could as easily turn his criticisms on himself: he has published in *Fortean Times*.

It is certainly true that Nessie has attracted the attention of persons who are interested in other anomalous claims. Bauer laments this. I say, so what? Any mystery is bound to attract all kinds of people, from naive seekers after wonder to critical-minded inquirers after truth. The first are easily ignored. The second, in my experience, almost invariably begin with an interest

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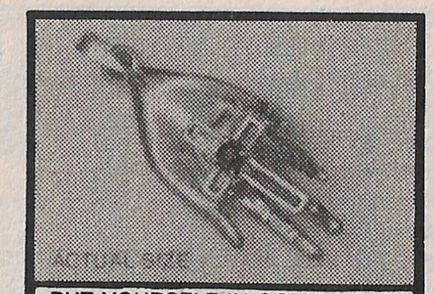

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in a single anomaly. That interest eventually leads them to consider the problems other anomalies face in proving themselves and attaining scientific recognition. Why shouldn't students of cryptozoology know something about the issues ufology and parapsychology have to deal with, if only to see what strategies proponents of UFOs and psi have developed in interacting with scientists, the media and debunkers?

There is also the fact that it is not hard for someone who believes a reasonable claim can be made for one establishment-rejected anomaly to understand how a reasonable claim for another anomaly may not receive a fair hearing. Unless the proponent has proven himself credulous by embracing all manner of notions for which no reasonable claim can be made (the hollow earth, Bermuda Triangle or whatever), it is unfair to damn him for an interest in more anomalies than one.

Ironically, while Bauer is quick to condemn FATE, *Fortean Times* and other similar magazines, his bibliography contains numerous references to articles in these publications. That's hardly surprising, since the publications Bauer considers "respectable" have no interest in systematically reporting anomalies. It's fortunate that we do have "fringe" publications. One day, when scientists get around finally to dealing seriously with anomalies, they will be grateful that *somebody* was recording these events.

Of course FATE, *Fortean Times*, et al, are not scientific publications and do not pretend to be. Yet, if science is defined as a process of continuing debate and self-criticism, these magazines, which frequently criticize and

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debunk specific claimed anomalies, have a greater claim to being taken seriously than, say, *Skeptical Inquirer*, which subjects its own pronouncements and favorite beliefs to no critical scrutiny to speak of.

Bauer's observations on ufology, parapsychology and astrology (which, because of Michel Gauquelin's work, has some claim to serious attention) show he knows so little about the subjects that one wonders why he presumes to judge them at all. His critical remarks on the UFO evidence (page 45), for example, are based on demonstrably false premises, as he would know if he were familiar with the literature. But I was amused to note, when I read (on page 146) Bauer's reasons for "belief" in Nessie, that, were I to change the word "sonar" to "radar," his sentiments would perfectly express my reasons for "belief" in UFOs. (He writes, "My own belief in Nessies is grounded on film and photos and the pattern of confirmatory sonar and eyewitness testimony and so forth.")

Worst of all, however, are the double standards Bauer employs without even appearing aware of what he is doing. Those amateurs (at least the ones who aren't outright charlatans) who investigate Nessie are heroes. Those amateurs who investigate other anomalies are flakes. And while Bauer decries the association of Nessie with other claimed anomalies, he himself is an active member of the Society for Scientific Exploration, an organization of academics active in a wide range of anomaly research.

I suspect that all of us who are interested principally in one anomaly (in my case it happens to be UFOs) would like

to think ours is special and all the rest mere delusions. A healthy avoidance of false pride should save us from that particular error. It is nonetheless true that there *are* more delusions than real anomalies out there. How do we tell the difference? For all his pontificating, Bauer never answers this question. Allow me to offer a simple, practical suggestion:

Ask yourself: Can the proponents answer their critics? By "answer" I don't mean simply insult them; I mean respond to them point by point with relevant evidence and rational arguments. When a claim can't be reasonably defended, it's probably bogus. If it can be — and cryptozoology, ufology, parapsychology and Gauquelin's neoastrology have been, repeatedly — it is still not certain that these claims are correct, but it is at least clear that they *may be* and so deserve further investigation.

The Enigma of Loch Ness tries to make Nessie a special case. It isn't. Like it or not, it is only one of a number of legitimate issues on the fringes of science. In arguing otherwise, Bauer's book, sad to say, muddles rather than clarifies.

OTHER REVIEWS

MUFON 1986 UFO SYMPOSIUM PROCEEDINGS edited by Walter H. Andrus, Jr., and Richard H. Hall, Mutual UFO Network, 103 Oldtowne Rd., Seguin, Tex. 78155, 1986, 186 pages, $11.50, paperback.

I have long thought that one of the major strengths of the Mutual UFO Network has been its annual symposia. MUFON has run public meetings of this kind for the past 17 years. It has

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